



Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a skeletal disease that reduces bone mass, erodes bone tissue and compromises bone strength. As women age and approach menopause, estrogen production slows, putting them at increased risk of developing osteoporosis. About two million Canadian women are living with osteoporosis, and as the population ages, this number is likely to increase. Research has shown that women can lose as much as 30 percent of their bone mass in the 10 years following menopause, posing serious health concerns.

Risk factors

The risk factors associated with osteoporosis are well-documented. They include:

Personal

- Older age
- Post-menopausal
- Experienced early menopause, natural or surgical (before age 40)
- Family history of osteoporosis, especially osteoporotic fractures
- Caucasian or Asian heritage
- Thin and small boned
- History of irregular periods, no periods or an eating disorder

Lifestyle

- Infrequent exercise
- Life-long low calcium intake
- Low Vitamin D intake
- Cigarette smoking
- Caffeine consumption (more than three cups of coffee a day)
- Alcohol consumption (consistently more than two drinks a day)

Drugs

- Corticosteroids
- Antiepileptic drugs
- High-dose thyroid medication

Early warning signs

A broken bone or fracture may be the first visible sign of osteoporosis, however the disease may already have done significant damage by that point. Osteoporosis Canada suggests that all post-menopausal women be assessed. A Bone Mineral Density test (similar to an x-ray) is a safe, painless way to determine whether you have the disease or are at risk of developing it in the future.

Preventative measures

There are effective preventative steps you can take: Vitamin D supplements and weight-bearing exercises such as walking help maintain strength, balance and flexibility, while calcium supplements help preserve bone density. Women who smoke can reduce their risk of osteoporosis significantly by quitting.

Exercise options

Weight-bearing exercises build bone mass. By adding activities such as brisk walking, low-impact aerobics, dancing and weight training to your exercise routine, you can help reduce your risk of osteoporosis. Women dealing with menopause should also practice stretching and strengthening exercises to keep muscles limber and toned; activities like yoga offer added benefits of relaxation.

Osteoporosis and hormone therapy

Though hormone therapy (HT) has proved to have a positive impact on bone health, it is not generally recommended as treatment specifically for osteoporosis.

Additional resources

Osteoporosis Canada

<http://www.osteoporosis.ca>

Canada's Physical Activity Guide

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide>

The SOGC has developed a collection of information materials for women with menopause-related concerns, however your health-care provider remains the best front-line resource to answer your questions.

Visit www.menopauseandu.ca for more information about menopause and other women's health issues.